

House Bill 42

April 2, 2009

Presented by Chris Smith

Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

HB42 requires FWP to establish a forest management planning process that addresses wildlife habitat enhancement, pine beetle infestation, and fire mitigation for land and property interest under the Department's jurisdiction with priority on lands with over 50 forested acres. The bill also establishes a revolving account so that proceeds from timber sold from FWP lands can be used to fund future projects. We worked with Rep. Vincent to amend the bill in the House and are seeking one additional amendment to make the bill move effective.

Currently, the Parks Division actively manages timber stands as part of its vegetation management practices statewide. In the past seven years, nine sites have been thinned either as part of managing fire risk - such as Lone Pine and Lost Creek State Parks, or as part of managing overall stand health and public safety hazards where dead and diseased trees have been removed at parks like Bannack and Placid Lake. Most State Parks and FASs are of smaller acreages so projects are proportionately easier to administer.

The Wildlife Division is also actively managing forest lands on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). For example, an EA was recently completed for a forest stewardship project on Mt. Haggin WMA. The project objectives are to conserve the bitterbrush, aspen and willow communities by slashing and logging conifers encroaching on those browse species. This effort includes harvesting beetle killed trees as well as evaluating forest stands to mitigate wild fire spread to neighboring land. The Department is working on a timber plan for Threemile WMA in the Bitterroot and developing a plan for the Ovando unit of the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA. As FWP learns how to implement Forest Stewardship type management, such activities are likely to increase.

HB 42 provides direction to FWP to continue these efforts. It also creates a Forest Management account, so that proceeds from timber sales are dedicated to future forest management efforts.

FWP is asking the Senate, with the sponsor's approval, to amend HB 42 to provide a statutory appropriation for the Forest Management account. This would enable FWP to put timber sale revenue back on the ground in the most timely fashion.

FWP asks for your support of the amendment and HB42.